



Tennessee Programs Promote Healthy Futures

As part of their continued efforts to engage the public with national service, the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS) has released their [2016 Public Engagement, Outreach, and Education Plan](#). As part of this plan, they have designated monthly themes throughout the year, centered on CNCS focus areas.

June's theme focuses on [Healthy Futures](#). According to CNCS, "millions of Americans face health problems that reduce their quality of life. Nearly half of U.S. adults don't receive needed preventive health services, too many of our nation's children and youth have unhealthy eating habits and don't get enough exercise, and many of those over 65 need physical assistance to live independently in their homes." CNCS and [Volunteer Tennessee](#) are dedicated to creating healthy futures for young and old alike through national service programs. You can join the conversation on social media by using #HealthyFutures.

How are AmeriCorps programs in Tennessee using resources in their areas to improve the lives of these individuals and empower them in their communities?

- The [United Way of Williamson County](#) (UWWC) is both a Volunteer Generation Fund and Volunteer Center subgrantee of Volunteer Tennessee, and has made amazing strides with healthy living programming. Last year, UWWC launched a community garden with the Franklin Estates Mobile Home Park in Franklin, TN.

More than 1,600 residents live at Franklin Estates, where the average family income is \$18,000 and 98% of the residents primarily speak Spanish. For those residents who do not have the means to travel a few miles to the grocery store, the community garden provides easy access to fresh, healthy food options.

The idea for the community garden emerged from another UWWC program, Full Tummies Warm Hearts, which provides food for students and families over the Thanksgiving holiday. After hearing from one school in Williamson County that many of their students were recipients of this program and lived at Franklin Estates, UWWC worked with the property manager to utilize a flood plain area where mobile homes cannot be located. The garden now grows potatoes, squash, okra, peppers, tomatoes, lettuce, onions, cucumbers and beans for the residents to harvest and provide to their families.

Following the opening of the Franklin Estates community garden, UWWC has opened another community garden and raised beds in other communities, continuing to promote healthy lifestyles to all residents in Williamson County.

- The **AmeriCorps Building Futures** program at the [AIM Center](#) provides consumer-driven psychiatric rehabilitation services that enhance recovery in the living, working, learning, and social environments of individuals in the Chattanooga, TN area. AmeriCorps members provide daily support to members of the AIM Center, helping them to improve their physical, mental, and emotional health.



Sam Spence serves as a Fitness Specialist at the AIM Center, where her responsibilities include improving both the physical and mental wellbeing of the members through activities such as yoga, soccer, and meditation. When she began as an AmeriCorps member, there were questions of whether AIM Center members would enjoy meditation activities, or if they would even attend the class. However, meditation has been a huge success for the members. Sam recalls one individual who has incorporated meditation into their personalized improvement plan, and has heard from her coworkers that the member is practicing meditation outside of the class and at home, working to channel positive energy throughout the day. Sam's ultimate goal for the members is to make them realize that healthy living is a habit that is built over time – and for those that stick with it, seeing success and results is the ultimate achievement.

Cecilia Luck is a Peer Support Specialist at the AIM Center, where she leads activities to support and improve the emotional health of the members. Her goal is to empower the members to take recovery into their own hands, with assistance from the AIM Center staff and AmeriCorps members. One of Cecilia's activities focuses on building healthy relationships by being able to have honest conversations and manage conflict in any relationship. Seeing the moments where the conversations at the AIM Center are applied in real life situations is rewarding for Cecilia. For example, one member at the AIM Center was very quiet and disengaged when Cecilia began her service with AmeriCorps, but through her Healthy Relationships activities, the member has opened up more and has begun having more in depth conversations with her. Through her service with AmeriCorps, Cecilia has been able to better empathize with the members at the AIM Center while helping them to meet their goals.

Cam Chapman is currently serving his second term as an AmeriCorps member with the AIM Center. In his first year, he served as the Fitness Specialist, and now serves in the Integrated Arts Unit (IAU). He helps individuals connect with resources in their community, setting up appointments with them, providing periodic assessments, and developing action plans related to their goals. Through his work with the IAU, Cam works with AIM Center members to develop a weekly television news broadcast for the center. Since beginning his service as an AmeriCorps member, Cam has noted that the AIM Center has provided him with the means to working with individuals with mental illness and co-occurring disorders, leading to him beginning a Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from East Tennessee State University this fall.

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[Volunteer Tennessee](#) is a 25 member bipartisan board appointed by the Governor to encourage volunteerism and community service. Volunteer Tennessee pursues its mission through administration of AmeriCorps grants, training and collaborations and coalitions with public and private organizations interested in volunteerism and service. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

AmeriCorps is a program of the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#), a federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, Social Innovation Fund, and Volunteer Generation Fund programs, and leads the President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve.